

Rural Broadband key to community economic success

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By Brian Depew

Only 38 percent of rural Americans have access to a high-speed internet connection. A vibrant future for rural America will require public policy that rectifies this situation.

High-speed Internet is revolutionizing the way we do business, and with this can come great opportunity for rural America. However, as long as millions of rural Americans are without broadband service and others are served only marginally, we will continue to fall behind in adoption of a technology that could propel us forward.

Additionally, from conducting political campaigns, to issue advocacy, to holding our legislators accountable, the internet is revolutionizing politics and governing itself. If rural Americans are not able to participate at the same rate as urban Americans, we will suffer worse policy and less government accountability to issues that matter to rural people and places.

The U.S. ranks 16th worldwide for the percent of citizens that have high-speed internet access, and we pay more when we do have access. In rural areas both access and affordability are significantly worse. Finally, any broadband network must remain open to all points of view, and private providers should be prohibited from curtailing free speech.

Access to high-speed internet in the 21st century is a public necessity similar to access to electricity in the 20th century. Much like the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, we need a Rural Broadband Act of 2009. Doing so is crucial to the future of rural America.

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